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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

*Memorandum*



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600  
6 January 1966

State Dept. review completed

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HIGHLIGHTS

There is reportedly some fear among the Vietnamese in Saigon that the Viet Cong may be embarking on a campaign of intimidation against prominent anti-Communist Vietnamese. This fear has been aroused by the assassination of a leading South Vietnamese journalist by the Communists.

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I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:  
Viet Cong terrorists struck twice in Saigon last night, exploding a powerful Claymore-type fragmentation mine in front of the main military gate at Tan Son Nhut Airport and leveling a police substation on the capital's east side with plastic bombs (Para. 1). An estimated Viet Cong company yesterday attacked two Popular Forces platoons on patrol near Phan Thiet, the capital of Binh Thuan Province (Para. 2). In coastal Phu Yen Province, Operation JEFFERSON, the joint ARVN/-ROK task force ground sweep targeted against battalion-strength or larger Viet Cong troops in heavily fortified defensive positions south of Tuy Hoa, entered its seventh day today (Para. 3). Operation LONG LANCE by the 1st Battalion/-1st US Marines southwest of Da Nang in Quang Nam Province continues according to plan, with only sporadic contact reported thus far with Communist forces in the sweep zone (Para. 4). For the second consecutive day, 27 USAF B-52 Stratofortresses conducted saturation bombing missions against suspected headquarters elements of the Viet Cong's Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) in Tay Ninh Province, 63 nautical miles northwest of Saigon (Para. 5). Two Regional Forces companies on a search-and-destroy mission in Bac Lieu Province yesterday engaged an enemy force of unknown strength in a heavy firefight (Para. 6).

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II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:  
An anti-Communist student demonstration was reported in Saigon today, protesting the terrorist assassination of a Saigon editor last week (Para. 1).

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An appraisal of recent coup rumors in Saigon concludes that there is no military or civilian group sufficiently strong or unified at this time to threaten the Ky government (Paras. 3-4). A Vietnamese pacifist, under detention by government authorities for illegal entry from abroad, claims to be on a hunger strike and is reportedly blaming the American ambassador for his plight (Para. 5).

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments:  
Nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: A survey of the activities of leading North Vietnamese party leaders lends further credence to rumors from Hanoi diplomatic circles that a central committee meeting was held in December (Paras. 1-2).

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## I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Viet Cong terrorists last night detonated a Claymore-type fragmentation mine in front of the main military gate of Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Airport, killing one Vietnamese and wounding four others, including three US personnel. The explosive device was mounted in a cyclo (motorized three-wheel open-scooter taxi) parked directly across the street from the airfield's principal military entrance. Approximately one hour later, a Vietnamese police substation on Saigon's east side was demolished by a second terrorist bomb blast. One policeman inside the building was killed and several bystanders were wounded by a plastic bomb hurled at the target by a passing bicyclist.

2. An estimated Viet Cong company yesterday attacked two Popular Forces platoons on patrol near Phan Thiet, the capital of Binh Thuan Province. However, the assault was successfully repulsed by the Vietnamese militiamen, resulting in 27 guerrillas killed (US body count) and six captured, in contrast to friendly casualties of two killed and four wounded.

### Allied Operations

3. In coastal Phu Yen Province, Operation JEFFERSON, the joint Vietnamese-Korean task force ground sweep targeted against battalion-strength or larger Viet Cong troops in heavily fortified defensive positions south of Tuy Hoa, entered its seventh day today. Two ROK Marine battalions are proceeding with search-and-destroy sweeps in the operational area, while two ARVN airborne battalions continue to occupy blocking positions flanking the sweep zone. There has been no change in casualties on either side.

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4. Operation LONG LANCE, a four-day search-and-destroy ground sweep initiated on 4 January by the 1st Battalion/1st US Marines southwest of Da Nang in Quang Nam Province continues according to plan, with only sporadic contact reported thus far with Viet Cong forces in the area. American casualties to date stand at two killed and 17 wounded, as against enemy losses of five killed, five captured, and 21 suspects detained.

5. Twenty-seven Guam-based USAF B-52 Strato-fortresses, striking in three waves of nine aircraft each, yesterday attacked adjoining Viet Cong target areas in Tay Ninh Province, approximately 63 nautical miles northwest of Saigon. It marked the second saturation bombing mission in as many days targeted against suspected headquarters elements of the Central Office of South Vietnam--COSVN--the highest Viet Cong politico-military coordinating agency in South Vietnam. No poststrike ground exploitation operations were planned.

6. Two Regional Force companies on a search-and-destroy operation in Bac Lieu Province yesterday established contact with a Communist force of undetermined strength. In the firefight that ensued, 14 government soldiers were killed (three US), 17 wounded (one US), and two missing. Enemy losses were unknown.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. An anti-Communist demonstration was reportedly staged today in Saigon by several hundred students, mostly girls, protesting the murder on 30 December of a Saigon journalist. The demonstration, ostensibly begun as a memorial service, apparently was peaceful.

2. The US Embassy has reported that the journalist's assassination has aroused some fear in Saigon that the Viet Cong may be embarking on a campaign of intimidation against prominent anti-Communist Vietnamese.

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3. An appraisal of recent coup rumors in Saigon concludes that no organized military or civilian group at this time appears in a position to threaten the Ky government. This judgment is based on the present dispersion of power within the military Directorate and the fact that nearly all of the potential opponents of Premier Ky have somewhat limited military assets in the immediate Saigon area. In addition, there has been no indication of detailed planning or alignment such as would probably be necessary for serious coup plotting, nor is it felt that the political and military situation is yet conducive to stimulating either popular desires for a change in government or the ambitions of potential new leaders.

4. The appraisal, however, notes that there is evidence of opposition to Ky, and that, if the war, or economic problems, should worsen, it is conceivable that public disaffection and internal opposition could lead either to a "legal" request of the Directorate that Ky step down or to efforts to unseat him by force. The question of who might replace Ky in such a situation is considered still open to debate.

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[redacted] Vo Thann Minh, a Vietnamese arrested in late August by government authorities for illegal entry from abroad via Cambodia. Minh--an elderly eccentric recently in the US and Canada, with a history of pacifist and anti-US activity--described himself as on a hunger strike to the death, if not released, and claimed that the American ambassador was responsible for his imprisonment.

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[redacted] Latest embassy information is that Minh was in good health, under house arrest in Dalat.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. Nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. A survey of the activity of prominent DRV leaders during the last two weeks of December tends to support the rumor out of Hanoi that the North Vietnamese held a central committee meeting in late December

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Available information on individual appearances indicates that the two DRV ambassadors who hold central committee membership--Nguyen Van Kinh in Moscow and Tran Tu Binh in Peking--were not at their posts in late December and may well have returned to Hanoi. Nguyen Van Kinh almost certainly would have returned home anyway in preparation of the Shelepin visit (his last reported appearance in Moscow was 15 December), and Tran Tu Binh has not been reported in Peking since 6 December.

2. At home, most of the politburo, with the exception of Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong, were relatively inactive during the period 15-31 December. In the week ending 31 December, Ho and Pham were the only politburo members to make public appearances in Hanoi.

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